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ABSTRACT

The process developed at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) for evaluating adjunct faculty in the English Department parallels the one developed by full-time faculty for their own evaluation. The process, which is overseen by the Program Head for English Adjunct Faculty (PHEAF), involves student evaluations, grade analyses, classroom observations, and evaluation conferences. The English department's student evaluation form contains 12 objective questions and four open-ended essay questions. Adjunct faculty must choose at least one of their classes to fill out this form. Results are tallied and summarized before they are presented to faculty in evaluation conferences, where patterns in student responses are discussed. Other components of the evaluation process include the following: (1) statistical analyses of the grades assigned in each class are used to compare the adjunct's grading patterns and retention rates with departmental norms; (2) adjunct faculty must submit copies of their syllabi for review by the PHEAF to ensure that they follow the guidelines set forth in the college faculty handbook; (3) anecdotal material, such as student complaints, positive and negative reports from the Writing Center Coordinator, and written complaints from clerical support staff, are added to the adjunct's evaluation folder; (4) at the adjunct's convenience, the PHEAF is invited to observe classes, taking notes on organization, effective use of time, enthusiasm, mastery of material, use of interesting materials, clarity of explanations, and student participation; and (5) a 15-minute evaluation conference with the PHEAF is held to review all evaluative material collected during the semester and to plan development activities. The program has been effective in uniting full-time and adjunct faculty in the common goal of teaching excellent classes. (JMC)

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EVALUATING ADJUNCT FACULTY IN AN English Program

by

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Northern Virginia Community College is a five campus college in the suburbs of Washington D.C. At Annandale, the largest campus, we have 13,000 full time equivalent students. Approximately 6,000 students take English at any one time. We have 30 full-time English faculty teaching all the courses, which encompass English as a Second Language, Developmental English, Freshman Composition courses, Business and Technical English and a comprehensive program of Sophomore Literature courses. During Fall, 1989 there were 250 sections of English offered. 35% of them taught by 54 part-timers. State guidelines mandate that 25% of all commumnity college courses be taught by part-timers.

Until a year and a half ago, adjunct faculty affairs fell under the aegis of the Assistant Division Chair (functionally the department chair) for English. When in Fall of 1989 the number of adjunct faculty went from 40 to over 60, the administration agreed to establish a Program Head for English Adjunct Faculty. I volunteered for the position. I am a full-time faculty who was 22 years ago hired from the adjunct faculty ranks. To perform my tasks, I am released from one class of the five I teach. Twenty percent release time for the extensive job is not enough, but I have enjoyed filling a job that needed doing and that has had such immediate rewards. My first task was to develop the job description. The Assistant Division Chair and I agreed that it would be best to develop the job description of this new position as we went along. By the end of the first year, all the tasks fell into the job description: recruitment, hiring,

hiring, scheduling, orientation, counseling, in-service education, and evaluation. We are now in the process of negotiating for more release time for this position, as it has become apparent that everyone is better served when one administrator is responsible for adjunct faculty: adjunct faculty needs are clearly better attended to; full-time faculty are more comfortable; students are better served now that the program is more consistent; and administrators are comfortable that the adjunct faculty's teaching effectiveness is better supervised.

This paper reports on the evaluation process that we have developed for these adjunct faculty. It parallels the process developed by full-time faculty for themselves. Part-timers are treated exactly the same and for the first time are held to the same standards. For Adjunct faculty, the process is clearly one aimed at increasing facualty effectiveness. The process includes student evaluations, statistical analysis of retention and grade assignment, tracking of anecdotal material, classroom observations, and evaluation conferences. I handle all steps of this process, including signing the final form. When I have completed the process, I give the folders with all the pertinent papers to the Assistant Division Chair and to the Division Chair who sign off on each package before they are sent to the Provost.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS: NVCC made student evaluations mandatory in 1989 and of course adjunct faculty were included in this dicta. Each department has its own instrument. The English department has one that is part objective (12 items that must be ranked from 1-5 and four open-ended essay questions).

Adjunct faculty must choose at least one of their classes to fill out this form, which is administered by a student, during each semester that they are employed. The student delivers the package to the division office. An office assistant tallies the results on a summary sheet and returns the package to me. I look at the whole package, making notes to share with the teacher during our conference. Faculty members are not allowed to see student evaluations until the grades are submitted, but during the ensuing conference, I show each adjunct faculty the summary sheet and discuss any item worthy of praise or improvement. On the summary sheet I look for a pattern of responses. Having looked at student evaluations for 60 faculty for 4 semesters now, I can say with certainty that the much appreciated and much unappreciated teachers' evaluations stand out from the bunch because the pattern of responses skew obviously to one side of the mean. A good teacher's responses will have 85% of the check marks in the "excellent" and "very well" column, with 15% dotted among the "average," "poorly," and "very poorly" columns. It seems to me that discussing student evaluations with teachers requires that the supervisor have extensive recent knowledge of student behavior in the classroom, because it is not always easy to discern the reasons for the skewed pattern of student responses. It is easy enough to respond to ten "poor" responses on whether the faculty member arrives on time, but it is not so easy to respond to 10 "poor" responses on whether the faculty member grades fairly. For these reasons I always <u>ask</u> the faculty member to look at the summary and then to describe what it means. I am always open to a report that this was a particulary obstreperous class, or that it was a very young

class, or a particularly excellent class and so on.

When we have two or three student evaluation summaries from Spring, Summer and Fall semesters in front of us during the conference, it is easier to see a pattern on which both teacher and supervisor can focus a discussion.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: The Office of Institutional Research puts out each semester a statistical overview of each class, with no delineation between full or part-timers. This gives numbers and percentages for total number of students, and the number who got grades A,B,C,D,F,W or I. I have an office assistant tally these so that we get an average for the department, including full-timers. These figures are then transferred to a form I have devised that compares each adjunct faculty's statistics with the average for the department and for the college (on the OIR report). Again, the pattern not the particular statistic is the basis of discussion during the evaluation conference. We look first at the retention figures as represented by the number of students receiving A,B,or C grades. The college average runs about 70% successful completion, but that figure is rather high for college writing courses, which average closer to 60%, and rather low for developmental courses, which average closer to 90%. Again, I ask the teacher to look at the figures and describe what they mean. Our department is particularly sensitive to discussion of writing course retention, seeing it as a minefield in the continuing controversies over literacy, revolving doors, assessment, and grade inflation. No one course with high or low retention would be considered worth of extreme concern, but again the value of this aspect of evaluation is that often we have conference table statistics from three semesters, often

allowing a patern to be discernible. Next, we look at the pattern of grade assignment. We have the average grades for each type of class, so that we might say for instance that the average grades in English 111 are 10% "A," 20% "B," 40% "C," and 30% unsuccessful. I ask the adjunct faculty in conference to describe his/her grade pattern to me as it compares with the average. The same concerns hover over the discussion as over the retention discussion. These statistics are only relevant as to the pattern they might reveal about being an overly "easy" or "hard" grader.

SYLLABUS REVIEW: Adjunct faculty must send to the Division a copy of their syllabi within the first two weeks of each semester, just as full-timers do. They design their syllabi under the guidelines mandated by the College Faculty Handbook as outlined in their Adjunct Handbook. (At hiring, they receive sample syllabi representing different approaches). I go over their syllabi, checking to make sure that each syllabus includes all material required by the College Course Content. I immediately send each teacher my comments on a form. This process is primarily designed to help new adjunct faculty blend into our large program quickly and easily and to provide a measure of homogeneity and continuity to the program. Within these guidelines, each faculty member is free to design his/her own course. The syllabi are kept on open file in my office so that all teachers might gleen ideas from each other's work. Then we are also able to discuss during the evaluation conference the adjunct's syllabus development, changes in teaching as revealed by the syllabus over the semesters, unit designs they felt good or bad about. This process is perhaps the single important item that helps keep me aware of the

of teaching quality in the classroom.

ANECDOTAL MATERIAL: Students do not know that my position exists. If they wish to communicate about any teacher, they will find their way to the Assistant Division Chair for English. When any problem about an adjunct faculty comes in to the ADC, she deals with it. Depending on the severity of the problem, she will talk with me before one or both of us contacts the teacher. Most often the student just wants to air the problem, so neither I nor the adjunct needs to be involved immediately. For example, if the student just wants another pair of eyes to grade a paper and explain again why the grade will stay a "C," the problem stays with the ADC. If the charge is sexism or racism, we'll have a full scale conference. Whatever happens at that moment, the ADC and I write a brief memo (usually by hand). I keep these on file. During the evaluation conference, I might bring the memo up and ask the teacher to write her/his own version of the event at the bottom of the memo. This paper is then added to the file. Other anecdotal material that would be handled in the same way are reports from the Writing Center Coordinator (for example that 15 students this week have come to the Center this week totally confused about X teacher's current writing assignment). Other reports come from the secretaries who often want us to know that students are asking frequently about teacher assignments so they can get or avoid a certain teacher. I ask the secretaries to commit these anecdotes to writing. I know there could be some concern about this system, but so far it has worked well. I found when I took this job that there was far too many rumors about part-timers and I wanted to track these down. Everyone is more cautious when having to commit to

writing. And faculty are pleased to be able to respond. Of course we are just as eager to write positive memos also. It is satisfying to open the folder at the evaluation conference and see several positive laudatory memos.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION: Until my job was created, no one had had the time to observe adjunct faculty in the classroom. I began the first semester by making it mandatory that new adjunct faculty invite observation their first semester of teaching. Gradually over the last four semesters, then, I also visited all the classrooms of senior adjunct faculty. I can now say that I really know all our faculty. Faculty invite me to their classes when it is convenient to them. I follow the usual format of sitting in back of the room, taking notes on organization, effective use of time, enthusiastic mastery of material, use of interesting materials, clear explanations, and student participation. I write my observations in essay format and give this to the faculty member to discuss at the conference.

CONFERENCE: Until my job was created, adjunct faculty had not had the luxury of evaluation conferences. The only college requirement is that an evaluation form be signed, and the adjunct faculty member's performance be checked satisfactory or unsatisfactory. They have customarily been checked satisfactory, except in unusual cases. Adjunct faculty are much more pleased now that they have the conference, though it does take up a lot of supervisory time; I have 54 people to get through in one week. I make up a folder for each faculty, including all the materials that I have collected during the semester. We then talk about all the matters in the folder. We spend only about 15 minutes in conference. Usually there is

is nothing startling to discuss, as I have usually had a talk earlier with the faculty if anything serious had come to my attention But it is during this time that I have had the opportunity to set up peer observation and peer meetings. Once I know the faculty's needs and strengths, I ask if they wish to be matched up with one another in an adjunct faculty buddy system. The teacher who wants to garner some tips on collaborative learning is asked to observe the crack teacher who does this superbly. The experienced teacher who handles three big classes, using process, looking at every draft students do, while handling her family and other jobs, is asked to speak with the new young teacher who is swamped with grading papers from one class while caring for a toddler at home.

This evaluation system has been successful because it has increase adjunct faculty effectiveness. Out of the conferences come adjunct faculty ideas for volunteer peer operated in-service training; for volunteer rap sessions; for a volunteer substitute list. These activities are now in place, in addition to the one mandatory in-service meeting per semester. I have also found a desk for each part-timer, solicited on a shared basis from full-timers. Adjunct faculty for the first time have a place from which to counsel students. At their suggestion, we set up a system for part-timers and full-timers to visit each others' classes on a voluntary basis as part of all faculty professional development. We now have a program in which all teachers in the English program work together for excellent classes.

THE END

Note: In 1990, the ESL program was split off, making this job more easily handled with existing 20% release time.

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